

Carlo Gabriel sat with his topcoat in his lap studying the mayor's portrait on the wall across the room. Despite the high ceilings and the cold outside, the inside air hung warm. Memories hung in the air as well, which he kept brushing back.

Without apparent cue, the bow-tied man behind the desk said, "Ms. Cantrell will see you now."

Gabriel lifted himself and sauntered toward the tall door ahead, which now swung open. A statuesque brunette in a business suit appeared and shook his hand.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, detective. Call from channel five on the snow removal—or lack thereof."

He thought to correct her on the detective title—"That's *Lieutenant* Gabriel, ma'am"—but then thought better of it. Now that he was reduced to doing detective work, that's what he seemed to most people.

He stepped onto a Persian carpet. She closed the door behind him and walked ahead to an oversized walnut desk and high-backed leather chair. The tall windows boasted a view of the cityscape behind her—the Civil Courts Building, the Old Courthouse, the Gateway Arch. Impressive. Her hair was held in place by a bone barrette in back; her suit—black pinstriped—featured a tight skirt that did quite not reach the backs of her knees. Gabriel pursed his lips. Of course he had seen her on television when she worked as an anchorwoman. But he had never seen her legs.

She indicated a wooden armchair across from her. He sat and laid his topcoat on the chair next to him. When he faced her she took in and let out a breath.

"My husband disappeared three days ago."

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He leaned forward. “Three days ... Saturday then.”

She nodded. He reached for his coat, black cashmere, and removed a notepad from its pocket. “When did you last see Mr. Cantrell?”

“Stone. Jonathan Stone. He left our apartment Saturday morning. I was still in bed.”

Despite the feeble winter sun her skin looked tanned. High cheekbones. Her perfume floated to him. “Where do you live?”

“The ABCs on Kingshighway. We own a condo there.”

He knew the building—a very correct address for urban white folks.

“Why did you wait three days before filing a report?”

She lifted a finger to her lips, full and pouting. “Is that what we’re doing, filing a report?”

“Just a manner of speaking, Ms. Cantrell. I understand the mayor wants it handled right.”

“I want it handled right. No need making anything official until we have to. I pray we won’t have to. He could show up anytime.”

She meant alive, surely. “So he’s been gone overnight previously? Without your knowing about it beforehand, I mean.”

“No, never.”

“Was he depressed?”

She blinked. “Jonathan wouldn’t kill himself, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“Any drug or alcohol issues? Sorry, I have to ask these questions. No disrespect intended.”

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“No.”

“You’ve been married how long?”

“Twelve years. We met at Mizzou.”

“Children?”

She shook her head.

“He hasn’t shown up at work?”

She shook it again. “They’re on semester break. He’s a college professor.”

“In what field?”

“English.”

“I presume money’s not an issue—gambling losses?”

She sniffed. “Jonathan wouldn’t be caught dead in a casino.”

“Any personal problems?”

A hesitation then, “You mean does he have a mistress?”

Gabriel shrugged a shoulder. It happens. Even when your wife is fine, and Ellen Cantrell was fine. “Whatever problems.”

“Jonathan’s a very private person. Keeps things inside.”

“Health issues?”

“Even being around students, he never gets sick.”

“How old is he?”

“Thirty-four.”

Gabriel nodded remembering what it was like at thirty-four. A pivotal age for many men, fueled by a mix of ambition, testosterone, and hope. But for him that was two decades past and he wondered how much he had left.

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“What about family members, parents, siblings...?”

“I emailed his mother—they live in Florida now. I was indirect but she obviously knows nothing. He was an only child.”

“The last time you saw him was Saturday morning?”

“I didn’t actually see him. As I said I was still in bed.”

“You share the same bed?”

Cantrell lowered her chin and studied Gabriel’s silk scarf, purple, draped down the lapels of his black blazer. It was the sort of question asked of a connected white woman that, in earlier times, could have earned a black cop trouble.

She lifted her eyes to meet his. He stared back, waiting for an answer, but all he got was: “I heard the front door closing.”